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# THE FREE ACEH ELECTIONS? THE 2009 LEGISLATIVE CONTESTS IN ACEH

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On the ninth of April 2009, Indonesia held its third set of legislative elections since the end of the New Order. Numerous political controversies unfolded in their wake: protests from losing parties, logistical problems, soaring campaign spending, and the emergence of coalitions preparing for July's presidential election. Another matter of deep concern was the electoral performance of Partai Aceh (PA, Party Aceh), representing Aceh's former rebel movement in the troubled province's legislative elections. Aceh's elections were critical for several reasons, affecting the possibility of renewed conflict, but also helping in evaluations of the effectiveness of international reconstruction, the quality of democracy in Indonesia as a whole, the experiment of fielding local parties in Indonesia, and the legacy of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Would PA win big in Aceh's provincial and district elections, and if so, would this constitute a rejection of national politics by Acehnese voters, or signify a demand for separatism?

It was clear long before election day that PA would gain substantial support from Acehnese voters. And it did. PA won a landslide victory, affirming the tremendous popularity of the former rebels and helping to legitimize years of struggle. But these elections were not simply a story of Partai Aceh dominance. They also highlighted distinctive regional blocks within Aceh and showed equivalent levels of support for

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Canada's Security and Defense Forum (SDF) and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for financial support. I also thank Diane Mauzy, Nathan Allen, Juanda, Melissa Duong, Ines, Quinn Dupont, Don Emmerson, Edward Aspinall, and an anonymous reviewer for providing extremely valuable feedback, as well as encouragement.

President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD). Based on electoral results, local media sources, and field interviews, this paper delves deep into the 2009 elections in Aceh.

State officials in Indonesia tend to fear that local autonomy and post-conflict elections represent the thin edge of the wedge, emboldening secessionists and leading ultimately towards independence for the region that has sought autonomy. On the other hand, concessions to restive local forces can also win local support for the central government and burden former rebel groups with the responsibilities and stresses of ruling. Whether or not autonomy and local elections diminish or increase the likelihood of separatism is a core debate in studies of civil wars. The 2009 elections in Aceh show that the effects of autonomy and elections are not zero-sum for state and rebel leaders. Many voters who supported Partai Aceh also supported Partai Demokrat in the national legislative elections and President Yudhoyono in the presidential election. The former rebels and national leaders were simultaneously provided with strong mandates. This is good news for Aceh and provides encouragement for resolving other secessionist conflicts.

The first section of this paper discusses the potential of local elections to entrench meaningful political autonomy in Aceh and to help overcome conflict. The second section provides some empirical context, describing the conflict and the lead-up to the 2009 legislative elections. The third section assesses the degree of support for Partai Aceh by examining provincial and district returns across Aceh. I suggest that, while PA scored impressive returns in the province as a whole, there was considerable district-level variation in the polling results, which showed three distinct blocks. In the capital of Aceh, as well as in highland and southwest coastal districts, national parties proved victorious. In the southeast and on the west coast, PA fared well, but did not dominate. Only along the northeast coast did PA secure a landslide victory, and in these regions, many voters failed to cast their ballots for national contests. The fourth section analyzes another significant outcome from the elections, one that demonstrates support for national politics. While the dominance of PA has gained significant attention, most commentators have ignored equivalent support for Partai Demokrat in both local and national elections. In local elections, PD placed second to PA, and placed first in some districts. And in the national legislative elections, PD captured over 40 percent of the votes in Aceh, rivalling PA's 45 percent in provincial races. Aceh's strong support for the president was confirmed in the July 2009 presidential vote, during which the president was supported by many former rebels and won over 90 percent of the vote in Aceh. The paper concludes by elaborating upon two themes coming out of the elections: Aceh's often overlooked and politically volatile fragmentation, as well as the interesting role of intimidation in these elections.

### **Autonomy and Democracy: Keeping the Peace**

Aceh's recent elections represent the intersection of two mechanisms for resolving ethno-secessionist conflict: regional autonomy and local elections. Debates regarding autonomy and post-conflict elections involve similar competing claims: does giving power to aggrieved parties satisfy or embolden them? In other words, do autonomy and local elections help the state or strengthen the secessionists? In this section, I review some criticisms regarding the potential of autonomy to help overcome ethnic

divisions and that cast doubt on the potential of elections to help overcome violent conflicts. I suggest that, in cases such as Aceh, where the implementation of local autonomy and elections occurs simultaneously, potential criticisms largely cancel each other out. Subnational democratization functions as an element of autonomy, as well as a guarantee that regional autonomy will not be easily rescinded. Granting political autonomy to ethnic minorities cannot be said to reify ethnic divisions after a conflict, where lines have already been drawn, while democratization does not bring significant instability when it takes place in a subnational unit of an already democratic country. In the end, the lingering question is whether autonomy and elections will combine to diminish or deepen separatist sentiment.

There exists considerable debate regarding the potential for local political autonomy to satisfy regional ethno-religious grievances and strengthen the national polity. Prominent theorists note the intrinsic value of autonomy in terms of representation,<sup>2</sup> as well as the instrumental benefits of the "political recognition of space" in creating more responsive states, satisfying local elites, and reassuring populations concerned about exclusion.<sup>3</sup> But there is no consensus that recognizing "ethnoterritoriality" will placate rebellious minorities. The difficulty is in determining when and how autonomy can be implemented without "fostering the very secession they aim to prevent."<sup>4</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Valerie Bunce provide constructivist critiques of autonomy, noting that in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, ethnofederalism provided the building blocks for dissolution, reducing interethnic cooperation and reifying ethnic divisions, as well as recognizing and empowering ethnic elites.<sup>5</sup> Edward Aspinall applies this perspective to Aceh, arguing that banal New Order celebrations of Acehnese culture helped reinforce ethnic distinctiveness and "helped to set the scene for the rise of separatist nationalism."<sup>6</sup> These criticisms of autonomy, though, are aimed at its ability to incubate conflict, not to overcome it. Once a conflict is already widespread, and ethnic lines are set, this criticism of political autonomy becomes less salient.

Remaining problems relate to the conditions necessary for implementation. Without institutional checks, committed national leaders, and turnover in local leadership, autonomy that has been granted can be revoked or ignored by central governments.<sup>7</sup> Aceh experienced precisely such a betrayal in the aftermath of the Darul

<sup>2</sup> Will Kymlicka, "Is Federalism a Viable Alternative to Secession?" in *Theories of Secession*, ed. Percy B. Lehning (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 109–48.

<sup>3</sup> Yash Ghai, "Ethnicity and Autonomy: A Framework for Analysis," in *Autonomy and Ethnicity: Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Yash Ghai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 2; Ted Robert Gurr, "People against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System," *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (Fall 1994): 347–78.

<sup>4</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 623.

<sup>5</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Valerie Bunce, "Is Ethnofederalism the Solution or the Problem?" in *Nationalism after Communism: Lessons Learned*, ed. Alina Mungiu-Pipidi and Ivan Krastev (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), pp. 179–98; and Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics* 54,2 (January 2002): 245–76.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Arend Lijphart argues that local autonomy requires, above all, elite cooperation, and that these leaders must "feel at least some commitment to democratic processes" and lend support to leaders from other

Islam Rebellion in the early 1950s, when Jakarta rescinded the autonomy that had helped end the conflict by placating the rebels. Michelle Miller finds that several attempts to establish Acehnese autonomy within the Indonesian state failed largely due to a lack of political will among national elites.<sup>8</sup> According to Rodd McGibbon's interpretation, the autonomy granted to Aceh in 2002–03 was a bargaining chip proffered by a weak Indonesian state; as the army and government reestablished their power, they began to take back these concessions.<sup>9</sup> The degree of autonomy that Aceh did receive benefited provincial leaders who were aligned with national interests, and who used their increased independence from Jakarta's authority as an opportunity to enrich themselves and their allies.<sup>10</sup> Miller, McGibbon, and other writers recognize that autonomy can do little to stem regional conflict without changes in provincial leadership and commitment from national actors.<sup>11</sup> This makes local elections and their immediate aftermath the litmus test for local autonomy, as they gauge the sincerity of national leaders by empowering popular regional representatives with independent mandates to ensure that autonomy will be carried out. Local elections are thus defining moments in the success or failure of local political autonomy in stemming armed conflict.

A different, second stream of scholarship studies elections as potential tools of conflict resolution. Elections can have intrinsic value as public contests that promise citizens representation and fairness, punctuate the end of lengthy peace processes, provide a fair test of public opinion, and grant legitimacy to the winning party. Electoral competition can also tame former combatants as they transform themselves into political parties.<sup>12</sup> There are also potential drawbacks. Moments of transition tend to bring about increased conflict, as elites jockey for power, the state weakens, long-standing tensions are unleashed, and militaries prepare to step in for the sake of stability.<sup>13</sup> The failure of post-conflict elections can also impair the potential for future peace efforts, and the strains created by elections can lead to splits in rebel forces, creating radical splinter groups that vow to fight on.

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groups. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 78.

<sup>8</sup> Michelle Ann Miller, *Rebellion and Reform in Indonesia: Jakarta's Security and Autonomy Policies in Aceh* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Rodd McGibbon, *Secessionist Challenges in Aceh and Papua: Is Special Autonomy the Solution?* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Policy Studies, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Isa Sulaiman and Gerry van Klinken, "The Rise and Fall of Governor Puteh," in *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. Henke Schulte Norholdt and Gerry van Klinken (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), pp. 226–52.

<sup>11</sup> Aspinall notes that Acehnese autonomy "had little meaning while local people could not even choose their own leaders." Edward Aspinall, "Basket Case to Showcase: How Indonesia's Democratic Transition Transformed Aceh," *Inside Indonesia* (April–July 2008), [www.insideindonesia.org/edition-92](http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-92).

<sup>12</sup> John Wood, "Secession: A Comparative Analytic Framework," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 14,1 (March 1981): 125.

<sup>13</sup> In cases such as Angola, "post-conflict elections precipitated renewed, even more destructive conflict." Terrance Lyons, "Post-Conflict Elections and the Process of Demilitarizing Politics: The Role of Electoral Administration," *Democratization* 11,3 (2004): 37–38. This pattern was certainly true in Indonesia, where the number of secessionist and ethnic conflicts expanded during the country's democratic transition. See Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).



Just as concerns about regional autonomy—that it will reify ethnic differences or be half-heartedly implemented by an unreliable central government—seem less relevant in post-conflict elections, the shortcomings of post-conflict elections are in many ways checked in the context of subnational autonomy. Most studies of post-conflict elections focus on national democratization, where democracy is introduced to help bring peace to an entire state. Aceh stands out as a case involving subnational democratization and conflict resolution, and it has benefited from the presence of stable democracy at the national level. This is of no small consequence. One of the greatest threats to post-conflict elections is an autonomous military acting as a spoiler. But under President Yudhoyono, the Indonesian military is largely under civilian control; the likelihood that meaningful local elections could succeed in Aceh would have been much lower in 1999, or even 2004.<sup>14</sup> Going into the 2009 vote, the incumbent president was not only directly elected, he was partially credited with resolving the Aceh conflict. Just as national elites are the key to the successful implementation of political autonomy, their commitment is also central to helping elections overcome regional conflicts.<sup>15</sup>

Aceh's post-conflict elections were the make-or-break moment for local autonomy, proving whether or not Indonesian leaders would tolerate the devolution of power to their recent enemies. Aceh was in many ways the missing piece of Indonesia's democratic transition. The elections promised to gauge the popularity of the former rebels, as well as gauge the legitimacy of the Indonesian state for residents of Aceh.

## Background

Aceh is saddled with a destructive, proud history of conflict. As a sultanate, it fought wars against the Portuguese, Malay kings, and tribes residing in its mountainous interior. From 1873, the Acehnese fought a long, bloody war against Dutch invaders, and in the 1950s, many Acehnese took part in the Darul Islam Rebellion against the Republic of Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> But not all conflicts in the region have been waged against outside threats. In 1947, Aceh's Islamic leaders and youth groups carried out bloody social revolutions against locals who collaborated with the Dutch, and in 1965 purged suspected leftists.<sup>17</sup> In response to the New Order's growing centralization, a number of Acehnese elites created the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) in 1976. For fifteen years, Aceh was home to intermittent skirmishes, growing Indonesian military control, and general disorder.<sup>18</sup> In the 1990s, these conditions erupted into widespread conflict, during which the rebel forces

<sup>14</sup> Marcus Mietzner, *Military Politics, Islam, and the State in Indonesia: From Turbulent Transition to Democratic Consolidation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publications, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> John Higley and Michael C. Burton, "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns," *American Sociological Review* 54,1 (February 1989): 17–32.

<sup>16</sup> Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, *The Republican Revolt: A Study of the Acehnese Rebellion* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> M. Isa Sulaiman, *Sejarah Aceh: Sebuah Gugatan Terhadap Tradisi* [The History of Aceh: A Challenge to Tradition] (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth F. Drexler, *Aceh, Indonesia: Securing the Insecure State* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

gained new popularity owing largely to a highly abusive Indonesian military, which galvanized public support for an increasingly sophisticated GAM.<sup>19</sup>

After the fall of Suharto, a conflict that was previously confined to the northeast coast was now felt on the west coast and in the mountainous highlands. GAM held significant territory along the north coast around Pidie, where it established an effective shadow government and led pogroms against ethnic Javanese communities. GAM committed human rights abuses, but these abuses paled in comparison to those perpetrated by the Indonesian military, which was caught in a vicious cycle: lacking civilian support, the soldiers punished locals for failing to stand behind them, thereby further eroding local support.<sup>20</sup> After a series of failed peace agreements, the December 2004 tsunami brought about major changes: public shock over the tragic loss of life, renewed goodwill towards Indonesia, and tremendous global support. Following this crisis, Indonesia's new president and vice president were more committed to peace and had greater capacity to accomplish it compared to previous administrations.<sup>21</sup> Two years of military assaults had seriously weakened GAM, which was experiencing a growing gulf between soldiers on the ground and the exiled GAM elite. These and other factors helped bring about the 2005 Helsinki Agreement.<sup>22</sup> With the agreement signed, GAM dropped its unconditional demand for independence, on the condition that Indonesia allow for more substantive Acehese autonomy and grant former rebels the opportunity to compete in provincial and district elections—as independents in executive contests and as a party in legislative ones. This compromise proved contentious, as Indonesian law stipulates that political parties must have national representation, a clause intended to forestall the creation of parties defined by narrow ethnic identities.<sup>23</sup> An exception was eventually made that allowed Acehese elections to feature independent candidates and local political parties, making it a test case for the whole of Indonesia.

The Helsinki Agreement was tested by the December 2006 Elections (*Pilkada*) for provincial and district executive posts.<sup>24</sup> GAM faced significant internal tension, with a split forming between older elites and younger cadres. In the end, two pairs of candidates with GAM credentials competed in the gubernatorial election, with the former rebel organization remaining officially neutral. The candidate favored by the younger forces won handily. Irwandi Yusuf, who partnered with independence

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Robinson, "Rawan is as Rawan Does: The Origins of Disorder in New Order Aceh," *Indonesia* 66 (October 1998): 127–57; Rizal Sukma, *Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Policy Studies, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Human rights abuses tend to be committed by weak armed groups, those that lack popular support in a given region and are unable to utilize selective violence. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> Even though President Yudhoyono appointed Vice President Kalla to search for new avenues in talks with GAM, Michelle Ann Miller reminds us that Yudhoyono did not immediately change Megawati's repressive policies regarding Aceh when he entered office, policies which he had helped author. Miller, *Rebellion and Reform in Indonesia*, p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Aspinall, *The Helsinki Agreement: A More Promising Basis for Peace in Aceh?* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Policy Studies, 2005); and Michael Morfit, "The Road to Helsinki: The Aceh Agreement and Indonesia's Democratic Development," *International Negotiation* 12,1 (2007): 111–43.

<sup>23</sup> Ben Reilly, "Political Engineering in the Asia Pacific," *Journal of Democracy* 18,1 (2007): 64.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "Local Elections and Autonomy in Papua and Aceh: Mitigating or Fueling Secessionism?" *Indonesia* 84 (October 2007): 1–39.

activist Mohammad Nazar, captured 38 percent of the vote, taking fifteen of nineteen districts and winning the election in a single round. The other pair of candidates with rebel links, Humam Hamid and his vice gubernatorial candidate Hasbi Abdullah, the brother of GAM official Zaini Abdullah, placed second with 17 percent of the vote, followed by candidates affiliated with Golkar and Islamic parties. Elections for executive positions in districts (Kabupaten) and cities (Kota) were more complex. Three contests went two rounds, with candidates aligned with the former rebels eventually taking eight districts and candidates linked to national parties winning eleven. In areas where GAM affiliates won, they won big, claiming 60 percent of the votes in districts along the north coast. Though the elections were relatively peaceful, candidates affiliated with both former rebels and national actors used money politics and intimidation to extend their victories in respective strongholds.<sup>25</sup> The sound showing of rebel-affiliated independent candidates is credited, in part, to the organizational capacity of the former rebels' Transition Committee (Komite Peralihan Aceh, KPA), which features "a strong hierarchical chain of command, with layers of authority running from the provincial town to the district, subdistrict, and village levels."<sup>26</sup>

Despite fears, GAM control of executive posts has not translated into renewed calls for separatism. The victors have been busy governing, managing international assistance, and maintaining the cohesion of the former rebel movement. GAM-affiliated leaders have managed to work with legislatures stacked with representatives from national parties, while also largely sustaining their popularity.<sup>27</sup> Leading up to the 2009 legislative elections, the Indonesian government's concern shifted to focus on the possibility that GAM had the potential to win control of both branches of government in the province and many of Aceh's districts.

### The 2009 Legislative Elections in Aceh

The race to form local parties (*partai lokal*, or *parlok*) in Aceh began with great fanfare. After intense debates, and a protest from Jakarta that the moniker "Partai GAM" contravened the Helsinki Agreement, the former rebels established Partai Aceh (PA).<sup>28</sup> From its birth, PA was swaddled in ethnic symbolism, as its candidates donned ethnic shirts, hats, and ceremonial daggers (*rencong*), communicated in Acehnese, and adopted a logo resembling the GAM flag. Bright red PA signs and offices were

<sup>25</sup> Ichal Supriadi and Shin Sheung Hwan, *Aceh: Balloting for Peace and Democracy* (Bangkok: ANFREL, December 2006). I worked as an election observer for the European Union in Nagan Raya, on Aceh's west coast. The EU found several instances of political brokers receiving funds in exchange for their assurance that their labor teams or villages would vote for a specific candidate, and I witnessed one case of intimidation by a Golkar affiliate. But infractions in the *Bupati*-level elections were largely overshadowed by the more successful and politically salient provincial vote.

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: How GAM Won in Aceh," *Update Briefing* 61 (March 22, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Governor Irwandi has gained popularity by opening an Air Asia flight from Kuala Lumpur to Aceh, by driving his own car, rather than depending on a chauffeur, and by conducting meetings with delegates in traditional coffee shops. Edward Aspinall, "Guerillas in Power," *Inside Indonesia* (October–December 2007).

<sup>28</sup> ICG, "Pre-Election Anxieties," p. 3.

immediately visible throughout the province, owing both to the genuine popularity of the former rebels and the organizational machine of the KPA.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to PA, five other *parlok* were also established by various streams of Acehnese society. They were SIRA (Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh, Independent Voice for the Acehnese), a vehicle for the vice-governor's civil-society base; PRA (Partai Rakyat Aceh, the Aceh People's Party), representing left-leaning civil-society groups; PDA (Partai Daulat Aceh, Aceh Sovereignty Party) and PAAS (Partai Aceh Aman Sejahtera, Prosperous and Safe Aceh Party), representing many of Aceh's *ulama*; and PBA (Partai Bersatu Aceh, Aceh Unity Party), established by a former Muhammadiyah activist. All six local parties used ethnic cues in their flags and speeches,<sup>30</sup> confirming the fear of national politicians that local parties would appeal to ethnic identity. But it was not only local parties that appealed to ethnicity, as candidates for national offices followed suit. In regions dominated by ethnic minorities, national parties also appealed to local ethnic identities. All six local parties were built on distinct networks and had high hopes for the elections. But it was abundantly clear that Partai Aceh was the favorite, and that it jealously protected its role as the mouthpiece for all Acehnese.<sup>31</sup>

In the months leading up to Aceh's elections, a number of disturbing incidents took place, including mysterious violence directed against KPA leaders.<sup>32</sup> On April 9, 2009, Acehnese voters went to the polls to vote in four different elections: the national upper house (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah, DPD), the national lower house (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, DPR-RI), Aceh's provincial legislature (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh, DPR-A), and district and city legislatures (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Kabupaten/Kota, DPR-K). DPD elections were the least politically charged of the four. Candidates ran as individuals for the largely symbolic positions in Jakarta. Below, I focus on Aceh's DPR-A, DPR-K, and DPR-RI elections.

### *A Mandate for Separatism?*

The two races featuring local parties in Aceh, the DPR-A and DPR-K elections, have garnered the lion's share of attention. As expected, Partai Aceh dominated these contests, taking 46.93 percent of the DPR-A vote.<sup>33</sup> In some districts, PA topped 70

<sup>29</sup> Through construction firms, the KPA wields considerable financial clout, an advantage that enables the PA to compete with large national parties in the all-important realms of advertising and money politics. Edward Aspinall, "Combatants to Contractors: The Political Economy of Peace in Aceh," *Indonesia* 87 (April 2009): 1–34; International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach," *Update Briefing* 90 (March 23, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> The logo for PAAS featured an outline of the province with a Koran pictured in the centre, while the PDA logo featured two minarets flanking a traditional Acehnese hat worn at weddings.

<sup>31</sup> Many PA posters referred to the party as "Partai Aceh GOP," a strange allusion to the nickname of the Republican Party in the United States, suggesting that their party is both old and grand.

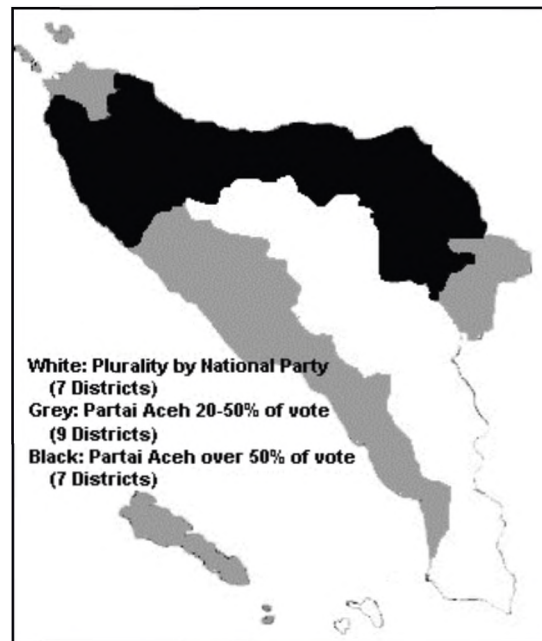
<sup>32</sup> Sidney Jones, "Aceh on a Knife's Edge: There are Big Dangers in Declaring Success too Soon," *Inside Indonesia* (January–March 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Official results have been difficult to collect. Immediately after the elections, ongoing results were published in the newspaper *Serambi*, but as counts became contested, *Serambi* stopped running them. Then, the results were posted on the electoral commission's website, but this site was taken down just prior to the release of the final count. For the DPR-RI and DPR-A results, I use the final count of the Indonesian Electoral Commission, reproduced at Aceh Eye ([www.aceh-eye.org](http://www.aceh-eye.org), accessed July 2009). For DPR-K



percent, an incredible margin of victory in an election featuring forty-four parties. It is important to stress that local parties did not win these elections, only one local party, Partai Aceh, did. In the DPR–A contest, PA received over one million votes, while the other five local parties together gained fewer than 145,000, a combined 6.4 percent of the provincial total. Many local parties reported intimidation from PA both during the campaign period and at the polls. But even if these charges of corruption and intimidation raise some questions about the outcome’s legitimacy, there can be no doubt that the election was a resounding indicator of rebel popularity.

**Figure 1. Voting Blocks in the 2009 DPR–A Elections**



This does not mean that the provincial and district elections played out exactly the way PA wanted, and it does not signal a rejection of national politics. PA’s 47 percent of the popular vote translated into 33 of 69 DPR–A seats, as their support was concentrated in the most populous districts. PA did not gain support across the entire province. Viewing the DPR–A elections by district, one finds three blocks, as illustrated in Figure 1, above.

In some districts, national parties won more votes than PA did. In Banda Aceh, Partai Demokrat (PD) narrowly defeated the former rebels, scoring 23.4 percent of the vote to PA’s 21.5 percent. In the four interior and two southwestern districts, PA fared poorly. PD won in Aceh Tengah with 17.2 percent of a highly dispersed vote. In Bener Meriah, Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia (PKPI, Indonesian Justice and Unity Party), an offshoot of Golkar run by former military officers, won a plurality with 17 percent of the vote. In Gayo Lues, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB, National Awakening Party), affiliated with Java’s Nahdlatul Ulama, won a plurality with 22

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results, I use the unofficial final count as posted on the Indonesian electoral commission’s website as of May 3, 2009. See <http://mediacenter.kpu.go.id/>

percent. Finally, in Aceh Tenggara, Golkar took in nearly a third of the votes. In these four highland districts, PA garnered an average of only 10.6 percent of the vote. Finally, the contests in two Malay districts in the southwest corner of the province fared similarly, with Golkar taking Singkil (25.2 percent to PA's 5.4 percent) and Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN, National Mandate Party) taking Kota Subulussalam (21.1 percent to PA's 8.6 percent).

Not coincidentally, the districts where PA fared poorly and national parties were victorious are the most ethnically diverse, home to Acehnese, Javanese, Gayo, Alas, and various Malay groups. The highlands were dotted with anti-PA posters written in local languages. These posters associated Partai Aceh with animals, labeled PA "Partai Yahudi" (Jewish Party), suggested that a victorious PA would seek independence from Indonesia, and demanded the creation of a new province for Aceh's ethnic minorities. Two such posters are shown below. They are not representative of the political opinion of Aceh's minorities and clearly reflect the agendas of local bosses. What they do show is that Aceh is not as united as many observers have supposed, and that PA support was not evident throughout the entire province, a conclusion supported by the election results.

Figure 2: Anti-PA Posters from Central Aceh (courtesy of Shawn Stein)



Aceh's ethnic minorities did not support PA, or other *parlok*, preferring instead to back various national parties. GAM was an ethnic movement, and PA is an ethnic party. In the highlands, local parties are "associated with the coast [*pesisir*], by implication, ethnic Acehnese and GAM supporters."<sup>34</sup> As I will discuss below, voting patterns in the interior and southwest are extremely important, as each region is home to campaigns to separate from Aceh and form new provinces (Aceh Barat Selatan, ABAS, and Aceh Leuser Antara, ALA). Observers often write these intra-state

<sup>34</sup> International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Pre-Election Anxieties in Aceh," *Asia Briefing* 81 (September 9, 2008), p. 4.

separatist<sup>35</sup> movements off on the grounds that they are elite-driven (they certainly are), but it remains true that anti-GAM sentiment resonates among minorities, and local leaders hope to capitalize on such sentiments.<sup>36</sup> Demands for the establishment of new provinces were amplified during the 2009 elections. Several candidates from national parties campaigned on these themes in the Singkil and highland regions, as shown in Figure 3.<sup>37</sup>

Figure 3. Golkar Campaign Poster for ALA Province



Far from demonstrating support for a separate Acehnese state, election results in the center and south of Aceh show support for local elites, national parties, and, for some, a readiness to separate from Aceh.

In a second block of nine districts, PA won the plurality of seats, but faced stiff competition. PA won about one third of the votes in hotly contested races against PD in Sabang and Aceh Besar. PA also won with about 30 percent of the vote in the southeastern corner of the province, in Langsa and Aceh Tamiang. Voting patterns in the four districts along the west coast were similar. PA won pluralities in Nagan Raya (30 percent), Aceh Barat (31.8 percent), Simeulue (35 percent), Aceh Selatan (39 percent), and Aceh Barat Daya (45 percent). So in nine districts, PA won the contests, but its victories were not overwhelming, and it certainly did not achieve numbers consistent with mass anti-Indonesian sentiment or some mandate for independence.

<sup>35</sup> Although the terms “secessionism” and “separatist” tend to be used interchangeably, “secessionism” technically refers to efforts to establish a sovereign state, while “separatist” is a broader term embracing movements “seeking a separate region within an existing state, as well as those seeking a separate and independent state.” Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 232.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Davies labels Gayo, Alas, and Malays as Acehnese “subethnicities,” and claims that these groups have been used by Jakarta elites to “gerrymander” the province. Matthew Davies, *Indonesia’s War Over Aceh: Last Stand on Mecca’s Porch* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> “ALA Tolak Pemilu 2009” [ALA Rejects 2009 Election], *Waspada*, June 10, 2008.

Ethnic Acehnese residents along the west coast tend to have a distinct regional identity. In these districts, PA did not dominate, and voters who supported local PA candidates simultaneously voted for President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat in the national legislature.

Things were very different in the seven districts along the north/northeast coast, an ethnically homogeneous region that is the heart of Acehnese culture and conflict. Here, GAM won between 58 percent and 76 percent of the popular vote. For instance, in Aceh Utara, PA scored 72 percent of the vote, while the runner-up PD garnered under 7 percent. Even more important than PA dominance, returns in these districts showed a gap between the total numbers of votes cast in local and national elections. In Pidie, the heart of the separatist conflict, there were 200,465 votes cast for the DPR-A elections (152,048 of them for PA, or 75.9 percent). But for the DPD (national upper house) and DPR-RI (national lower house) elections, the total votes cast in Pidie were 122,915 and 134,632, respectively. This suggests that 70,000 voters in Pidie, or half of PA's supporters, chose not to participate in national politics. A similar gap marked voting in Aceh Timur, Pidie Jaya, and Aceh Utara, and, to a lesser extent, in Lhokseumawe, Bireuen, and Aceh Jaya. This is surprising, given that many PA activists endorsed PD in the DPR-RI elections, but die-hard GAM supporters ignored this endorsement and opted to spoil their ballot.

In sum, there were three distinct regions in the DPR-A elections. Regions dominated by ethnic minorities voted for national parties, and PA received extremely little support from these voters. Around Banda, in the southeast, and along the west coast, PA won pluralities. In these districts, voters also supported PD nationally, sending a message of conditional support for the status quo, approving of peace and autonomy. Finally, along the north and east coasts, PA totally dominated, and here, some voters chose not to participate in national politics. In these districts alone can the electoral results be interpreted as suggesting a demand for separatism.

### *A Mandate for Peace*

A second finding that contradicts any interpretation of the 2009 elections as clear demonstrations of PA dominance concerns PD: the party that came in second in district and provincial elections, and first in Aceh's DPR-RI vote. Despite a long-standing local tradition, Acehnese did not vote for Islamic parties in 2009. Aceh's voters supported Masyumi in the 1955 elections, and under Suharto they mostly supported PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, the Unity Development Party),<sup>38</sup> which also won a plurality in the 1999 provincial legislature with 29 percent of the vote. In 2004, individual Islamic parties were edged out by Golkar, but together they dominated the provincial legislature, and Aceh was one of two provinces where Amien Rais, leader of the pan-Indonesian Muhammadiyah organization won the first round of the 2004 presidential elections. But in the 2009 legislative elections, Muslim parties were hit hard, with PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party), PPP, and PAN ranked fourth, fifth, and sixth in DPR-RI voting. This affirms the non-religious nature of Aceh's

<sup>38</sup> Dwight Y. King and M. Ryaas Rasjid, "The Golkar Landslide in the 1987 Indonesian Elections: The Case of Aceh," *Asian Survey* 28,9 (September 1988), pp. 916-25.



resentment towards Jakarta,<sup>39</sup> and may suggest that ethnic Acehnese support for Islamic parties under Sukarno and Suharto should be interpreted as protests against Jakarta, not simply as expressions of Islamist sentiment. Nor did voters in 2009 choose Golkar, which once enjoyed firm control of Aceh's provincial legislature and bureaucracy.<sup>40</sup> Golkar managed to win only 6.3 percent of the DPR-A vote and 10 percent of Aceh's DPR-RI vote, down from the 16 percent it secured in 2004.

Equally important as PA's impressive victory, but largely overlooked, was the parallel mandate for President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat. For once, Aceh was consistent with trends across Sumatra and Indonesia as a whole, as PD was supported across the archipelago.<sup>41</sup> First, PD fared relatively well in Aceh's local elections. Without enjoying the benefits of established local networks, PD managed to come in second to PA, winning 10.8 percent, and scoring pluralities in two districts. PD placed second in all PA strongholds, defeating both Islamic and other local parties. And perhaps most importantly, PD was the only party that found support across all of Aceh's districts.

But it was Acehnese support for PD and SBY in the DPR-RI vote that was most striking. PD gained a plurality of the votes for the national parliament in all but one district. PD candidates won, and they won by wide margins, rivaling PA success in local elections. Whereas PA won 47 percent of the vote for the DPR-A, PD won 41 percent for the DPR-RI. The only aberration was in rebel strongholds, where PD gained by far the most votes, but thousands of persons did not cast a ballot in the national election. The equivalent support for PA in the DPR-A and PD in the DPR-RI was especially surprising because, while PA support could be partially attributed to KPA organization, intimidation, and money politics, PD had little presence on the ground. Given that PD is a new party with few local roots, this was a strong endorsement for the president, and by extension, the peace process.

This support was confirmed by the July 2009 presidential elections. Officially, Partai Aceh remained neutral; according to one spokesman, "as an institution, Partai Aceh does not support any presidential candidate. We have decided that neutrality is best."<sup>42</sup> This said, many former rebels and Partai Aceh leaders publicly pledged their support to PD as individuals.<sup>43</sup> Aceh's Governor Irwandi and Vice-Governor Nazar, along with several *bupatis* and civil servants, joined SBY's campaign teams as volunteers, promising to help SBY-Boediono win in Aceh. The results were unprecedented for a free election. Against two rival pairs, SBY-Boediono secured over

<sup>39</sup> Aspinall, *Islam and Nation*; Shane Joshua Barter, "Resources, Religion, and Resistance: The Sources of Conflict in Aceh," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19,1 (January 2008): 39–61; Damien Kingsbury, "The Free Aceh Movement: Islam and Democratization," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 37,2 (May 2007): 166–89.

<sup>40</sup> R. William Liddle, "Let Aceh be Aceh," *Tempo*, July 4, 1987.

<sup>41</sup> Mietzner attributes pan-Indonesian support for Partai Demokrat to the president's new social welfare programs, which gave funding directly to the country's poor. Although these projects may have played a role in PD's success in Aceh, those people I spoke to emphasized the importance of SBY in the peace process and his control of the military. Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Populism, Dynasties, and the Consolidation of the Party System," *Analysis* (Sydney: Lowry Institute, May 2009).

<sup>42</sup> "Secara institusi, Partai Aceh tidak memberikan dukungan kepada capres mana pun. Kami memilih lebih bersikap netral saja." "Irwandi-Nazar Masuk Tim Kampanye SBY: Partai Aceh Neutral" [Irwandi-Nazar Enter SBY's Campaign Team: Aceh Party Neutral], *Serambi Indonesia*, June 9, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> "Aceh People Support SBY-Boediono: Ex-Rebel," *Antara*, June 6, 2009.

60 percent of the vote across Indonesia, but in Aceh, they won with over 90 percent of the vote.<sup>44</sup> Local journalists were quick to explain the landslide victory of SBY–Boediono by the fact that they had secured PA’s blessings.<sup>45</sup> There is no doubt some truth to this; PA and the KPA wield considerable clout, accounting for a portion of the victory. PA’s endorsement of SBY in the presidential elections was also a response to the president’s popularity in Aceh, an interpretation supported by PD’s electoral success in the legislative election, before KPA endorsement. While in part due to PA support, the total victory of SBY–Boediono also rests on genuine support for the president among Acehnese and non-Acehnese residents of Aceh. Both sets of elections demonstrate the strength of Aceh’s newfound peace, with the president of the republic supported by Acehnese voters and the former separatists.

## Implications

### *Fragmentation*

Before concluding, two additional implications arising from the elections deserve some attention. First, this paper has emphasized regional variations in electoral results and the use of rival ethnic cues by candidates and parties. Aceh’s deep geographical and ethnic divisions are nothing new. For much of Acehnese history, sovereignty was divided among any number of pepper merchants based at the mouths of small rivers, ruling small strips of land located between the ocean and steep mountain ranges.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, ethnic groups in the interior, such as the Gayo and Alas, developed distinct senses of identity, embracing Islamic practices adopted from West Sumatra.<sup>47</sup> Ethno-geographical divisions were also evident in recent decades. Although elections during the New Order era were by no means fair or free, it is clear that, in these elections, “Acehnese ethnicity and support of the PPP seemed synonymous,” while voters in the highlands and the south supported Golkar as a “way of reasserting ethnic identity.”<sup>48</sup> These divisions also shaped conflict dynamics. Until the end of the New Order, the conflict was limited to the north coast. It expanded west in 1998, and took on a very different character in highland and southern regions. Parallel regional dynamics existed during the Dutch War and Darul Islam Rebellion, which also emanated from the north.

The 2009 elections, as well as the local executive elections in 2006, provide vivid illustrations of these regional dynamics. They remind us that Aceh is not homogeneous, and that the prominence of regions marked by strong, genuine GAM support should not lead to assumptions regarding the province as a whole. Too often,

<sup>44</sup> Hotli Simanjuntak, “Yudhoyono Excels in Aceh, Despite Kalla’s Contribution to Peace Process,” *Jakarta Post*, July 9, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> “Kader Partai Aceh Ikut Menangkan SBY–Boediono” [Aceh Party Cadres Join in the Victory of SBY–Boediono], *Tempo*, July 9, 2009; Rina and Radzie, “Partai Aceh Faktor Kemenangan SBY: Pengamat,” [Aceh Party a Factor in SBY’s Victory: Observer] *Acehkita*, August 7, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Finngeir Hiorth, “A Sketch of Aceh’s History,” *Kabar Sebarang* 22 (1991), p. 2; Anthony Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese and Other Histories of Sumatra* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> King and Rasjid, “The Golkar Landslide in the 1987 Indonesian Elections,” p. 924.

writers explain anti-GAM sentiment among Aceh's minorities in terms of elite machinations, downplaying historical and ethnic factors, favoring instrumental ones, and failing to explain why the masses follow these elites. The electoral results suggest we should be cautious about treating armed conflicts as consistent across time, place, and ethnic groups.

Consistent with the fears of Indonesian lawmakers, Partai Aceh is an ethnic party. It relies on a local ethnic language and visible ethnic cues, considers itself the protector of an ethnic group, and draws its support exclusively from ethnic Acehnese (even if not all ethnic Acehnese vote for PA).<sup>49</sup> Because PA is an ethnic party, it lacks support among minorities, a source of friction in provincial politics. How this plays out will depend on the extent to which the former rebels reach out to non-Acehnese residents. Governor Irwandi has made significant strides forward, for instance by appointing Gayo provincial separatist leader Iwan Gayo to head the Committee to Accelerate Development in Neglected Regions (Komite Percepatan Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal, KP2DT). Acehnese politics in the coming years will turn largely on the ability of the local government to bridge regional and ethnic gaps in the province.

### *Cheating for Emphasis?*

Another interesting aspect of the 2009 elections concerns the nature of money politics and intimidation. PA won 75 percent of the vote in some districts, and individual national parties won 30 percent in the highlands, including over 75 percent in some subdistricts. Why did different regions display such high levels of support for particular parties? The most important reason is popularity. There is no doubt that PA is immensely popular along the north coast, just as there is no doubt that former bureaucrats and ethnic minorities support Golkar and other national parties. But the support for each side was also amplified by money politics and intimidation.

Cases of PA intimidation are not difficult to find.<sup>50</sup> In Pidie Jaya, representatives from the PKS reported that their party volunteers had been intimidated by the former rebels.<sup>51</sup> In Aceh Selatan, candidates from smaller local parties received threatening text messages. They refused to name which party sent them, but shared photographs of PA security guards wielding camcorders and wearing flack jackets in polling stations.<sup>52</sup> Aspinall has documented the development of KPA protection rackets and related corruption, which became important elements of PA financing.<sup>53</sup> Many PA campaign posters featured weapons, such as assault rifles, as shown in Figure 4. PA

<sup>49</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> Ben Hillman, "Aceh Party Victory Legitimate despite Threat," *Jakarta Post*, July 7, 2009; Sidney Jones, "Aceh on a Knife's Edge"; Blair Palmer, "The Aceh Party: The Elections Were Tense in Aceh, but in the End Helped to Consolidate the Peace Process," *Inside Indonesia* (July–September 2009); "Partai Aceh Mulai Intimidasi [Aceh Party Begins Intimidation], *Waspada*, July 8, 2008; World Bank, *Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update* (Summer 2008), available at [www.conflictanddevelopment.org](http://www.conflictanddevelopment.org), accessed July 2009. Similar dynamics were evident in the 2006 *pilkada*. "Aceh Pilkada Dynamics Update," *Forbes Damai*, December 5–22, 2006.

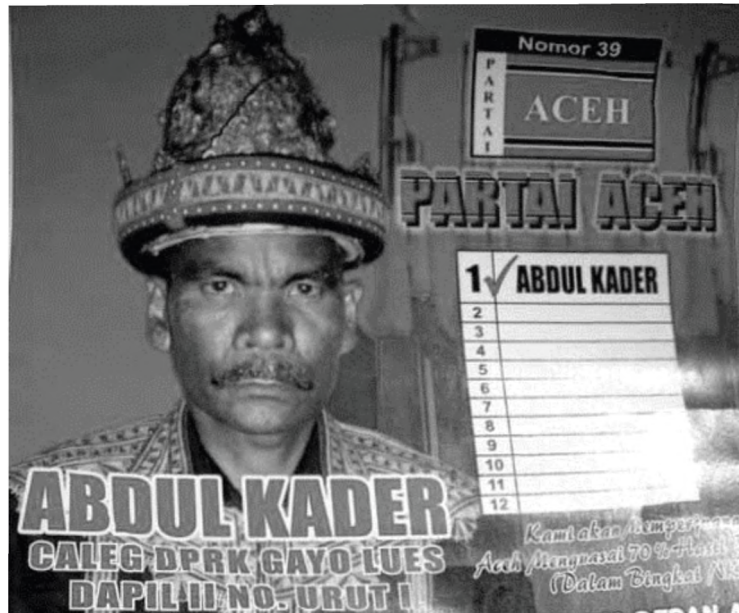
<sup>51</sup> "Islamist Party Claims Unfair Elections in Pidie Jaya," *The Jakarta Post*, April 19, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Interviews with district SIRA and PRA officials, Aceh Selatan, April 15–25 2009; ICG, "Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach," p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Aspinall, "Combatants to Contractors," p. 15.

was not above using intimidation and money politics to secure a victory in the recent elections. Although PA is popular, its politics are by no means clean.

**Figure 4. PA Candidate Flanked by Guns**



In an example from the other side, Golkar won 33 percent of the vote in Aceh Tenggara, despite polling only 6 percent in the province and 10 percent in neighboring Gayo Lues. In one ward I visited in Kutacane, Golkar scored 85 percent. Locals explained that Golkar is extremely popular here, a legacy from the years when it protected the community from GAM insurgents and championed local development. But residents also noted that Golkar distributed considerable *sembako*,<sup>54</sup> cash gifts, to voters, and most disturbingly, warned that violence would return if PA were elected.<sup>55</sup> Smaller local parties reported high levels of intimidation from militias and security forces, and said that they had felt sandwiched between PA and Golkar.<sup>56</sup> The day after the elections, subdistrict aggregation offices in Aceh Tenggara were littered with intelligence agents and soldiers blocking local parties from entering, assisted by thugs reportedly working for local strongman, Armen Desky. Shortly afterwards, local party witnesses in Kutacane discovered open fraud being carried out by officials counting votes in a coffee shop.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Sembako* (*Sembilan Bahan Pokok*, Nine Basic Needs) refers to basic commodities such as rice, sugar, cooking oil, meat, eggs, milk, corn, fuel, and salt.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Faisal, PRA DPR-A candidate in Kutacane, Aceh Tenggara, April 7, 2009. One village chief explained that if his village failed to vote for Golkar, they would likely be denied army protection against GAM incursions if and when the conflict started up again. Interview with Jainal, chief of Jangar village, April 10, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Ubaidi, PRA DPR-A candidate and NGO activist in Kutacane, Aceh Tenggara, April 8, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> "Kasus PPK Babul Makmur P21" [A Case of Arrest at the Subdistrict Election Office in Babul Makmur] *Serambi Indonesia*, April 29, 2009; "Rekap Suara di Kafe, Petugas PPK Ditangkap" [Vote Counting in a Café, Subdistrict Election Office Clerk Arrested], *Serambi Indonesia*, April 16, 2009.



What is most fascinating about this widespread presence of bribes and thugs is that neither side cheated to win. In northern regions where PA polled in the 80 percent range, and in highland areas where Golkar affiliates ruled, electoral success was more a product of genuine popularity than the result of goons, guns, or gold. The elections were not necessarily free, as they did involve coercion,<sup>58</sup> and were not fair, as both sides were accused of biased vote counting in respective strongholds.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the elections passed one of the core tests to determine whether an election has been representative, for these problems did not call into question the final results, which reflected “the expressed will of the people.”<sup>60</sup> In a more transparent election, Golkar would still have won in Kutacane, and PA would clearly have taken the north coast. Acehnese and Indonesian nationalist parties each appeared to cheat not in order to win, but as a matter of emphasis. The reason for this outcome relates to the politics of separatism, and, by extension, ethnic identity. Powerful parties in respective strongholds did not only want to win, they wanted to show they were dominant in order to help justify years of war, deter future challengers,<sup>61</sup> and perhaps naturalize future demands for new political units.<sup>62</sup> If tensions should grow, each side will probably cite its own overwhelming electoral support in efforts to recast Aceh’s borders.

## Conclusions

In 2006, former GAM rebels were elected to many executive posts in Aceh, and after April 2009, they came to control local legislatures as well. PA won 75 percent of the vote in parts of Aceh, approaching 50 percent across the province. Did the substantial victory of Partai Aceh entail a rejection of national politics? Did the elections deepen or diminish separatist sentiment?

I have argued that Aceh’s elections, while showing obvious voter support for the former rebels, actually produced mixed results for PA and demonstrated significant support for national actors. First, I have shown that, while impressive, the PA victory in the provincial elections was not as clear-cut as it may initially appear. PA dominance in 2009 was limited to the northern coast, where many voters refused to participate in national politics. In the rest of the province, support for PA was mixed. PA victories

<sup>58</sup> Aceh’s elections were marked by freedom of speech, of movement, and of candidacy, but not freedom from fear. For Dahl, security from physical intimidation is the most important element of a free election. Robert H. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>59</sup> Partai Aceh and national party strongholds resembled what Sartori and Diamond call hegemonic semi-democracies, “in which a relatively institutionalized ruling party makes extensive use of coercion, patronage, media control, and other features to deny formal legal opposition parties a fair and authentic chance to compete for power.” Larry Diamond, “Defining and Developing Democracy,” in *The Democracy Sourcebook*, ed. Robert H. Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003), p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Jorgen Elkit and Palle Svensson, “What Makes Elections Free and Fair?” *Journal of Democracy* 8,3 (1997): 38.

<sup>61</sup> Alberto Simpser, “Cheating Big: On the Logic of Electoral Corruption in Developing Countries,” paper presented to the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 7, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> An alternative explanation may be that the elections in Aceh are performative—efforts to display pomp and power. Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

were slim in districts around Banda, along the west coast, and in the southeast, and in ethnically heterogeneous districts, PA lost to various national party candidates despite a highly dispersed vote. Second, PD won levels of support comparable to that earned by PA. In local elections, PD placed second to PA and garnered support across the province. In the national elections, PD won convincingly; for the first time, voters in Aceh supported the dominant national party and the incumbent president.

Earlier, I argued that the intersection of regional autonomy and subnational democratization represents a unique opportunity for managing ethnic conflict. The lingering question was whether local Acehnese elections involving former rebels as candidates would diminish or deepen separatist sentiment. This is the fundamental question that arises for scholars studying civil conflicts throughout the world; it prompts us to ask whether concessions will embolden or satisfy rebels, and strengthen or weaken the state. The 2009 Aceh elections demonstrated that post-conflict elections do not necessarily create conditions in which one party takes all. The former rebels and national political actors won simultaneous mandates. Despite the ethnic nature of voting and elements that prevented the vote from being entirely free or fair, the 2009 elections in Aceh provided payoffs for the state as well as for the rebels. This is an important lesson relevant to armed conflicts around the world, for it should reassure both states and rebels that the gains of one side need not necessarily entail losses by the other. Aceh's voters communicated to national leaders and the former rebels that they favor the status quo, namely, peace. The former rebels will be constrained by knowledge of Acehnese support for national politics, while national political actors will be constrained by knowledge of the tremendous support enjoyed by the former rebels—an ideal balance of power for sustaining peace in Aceh.

Looking ahead, though, I should note that Aceh's citizens cast their votes to show support for SBY more than for his party or national politics. The fact that Aceh's voters supported PD and SBY even in the absence of local PD networks, even "where it did not campaign at all," demonstrates the president's popularity,<sup>63</sup> but it also spells potential trouble for 2014, when SBY's term ends. SBY has not groomed a successor, and it is unclear whether Aceh's voters or the former rebels will offer such support to another national politician. Electoral support for SBY is one of the few threads bridging the fragmented province internally and with Indonesia. Whether or not Acehnese continue to support national political actors, and whether Aceh's minorities mute their calls for a new province, will depend a great deal on the president's successor. If all goes well, conflicts that do arise in Aceh can play out peacefully, within institutional channels.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Palmer, "The Aceh Party."

<sup>64</sup> One possibility would be to establish a national Aceh party, which might be able to unite governing coalitions. Dan Slater refers to Indonesia as a cartel democracy, since every party joins the presidential cabinet, thus leaving no functional space for significant opposition, a situation that creates a striking hole in and damages Indonesia's democracy because voters are left with no way to punish the government. In terms of sustaining peace in Aceh, though, this inclusive cartel system might be advantageous since it might motivate a national Partai Aceh to integrate into Indonesian politics. Dan Slater, "The Ironies of Instability in Indonesia," *Social Analysis* 50,1 (Spring 2006): 208–13.